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## Saudis Less Stable Than U.S. Claims

**T**he Reagan administration is quietly preparing a new arms package for Saudi Arabia, the premier Arab oil nation. This likely will provoke a major battle on Capitol Hill.

The State Department already has begun briefing members of Congress in secret, hoping to persuade them how important it is to bolster Saudi military power.

A crucial consideration is the stability of the imperial Saudi regime. Congress doesn't want a replay of Iran, where the shah was kept in power with the not-so-covert aid of the CIA. This embittered the populace toward the United States.

When the shah was driven from the throne, he left a legacy of political extremism, hatred for America, economic disintegration and broken lives.

Congress will demand to know whether the Saudi royal family is more entrenched and, therefore, a more dependable ally. Secret intelligence on this score does not square with public assurances.

The royal rulers are vulnerable, for instance, to harassment by Shiite fanatics who respond to that wily old octopus, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

What makes this all the more ominous is that the Shiites are concentrated in the Saudi oil fields and constitute one-third of the work force of Aramco, the state-owned oil monopoly.

The Shiites resent the years they have been treated as second-class citizens. A secret, 100-page report obtained by my associate Lucette Lagnado warns: "One cannot totally reverse Shia antipathy toward the government, amounting in some cases to deep and abiding hatred for the royal family, which years of neglect has bred."

Some Shiites, roused by Khomeini's fulminations, will begin to associate their grievances with the United States, the report predicts. Written by one of the State Department's leading Arab experts, David Long, in 1980, it emphasizes: "The consequences of possible Shia uprisings could be devastating to oil production," noting that the Shiites, influenced by Iran, are in a perfect position to sabotage Saudi oil installations.

So vast and empty a space as Saudi Arabia would be difficult to defend. The imperial family relies on a small army of dubious loyalty and a haphazard security apparatus.

"There is real fear for the security of the regime over the loyalty of the military," the Long report says. It tells of past military arrests "for subversive activities" and "Saudi distrust in a professional military establishment."

Fear of attack has driven the Saudi rulers to arm their defense forces with sophisticated American weapons. But suspicion of the military has caused them to withhold the wherewithal. Notes the report: "Traditionally, the Saudi military has never been issued fuel and ammunition in large quantities or at the same time."

"Royal family reluctance to trust too greatly in the loyalty of the military establishment," the report adds, has produced slowdowns and delays.

Then the report offers this revelation, which may surprise members of Congress being cajoled by the administration: "Due largely to Saudi ambivalence toward a modern military force, there is relatively little to show for nearly 30 years of U.S. military training . . ."